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ORATION

OF

JAMES SPEED,

UPON THE

INAUGURATION OF THE BUST OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

At Louisville, Ky., February 12, 1867.

LOUISVILLE:
BRADLEY & GILBERT, CORNER THIRD AND GREEN STREETS.
1867.

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ORATION.

Mr. Chairman, and Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am embarrassed because I knew, admired, and loved Abraham Lincoln. His hold upon the deepest and truest feelings of my nature was and still remains so strong and firm that I cannot push him and his memory so far off as to catch and give a complete delineation of his character. His personal friendship was so true and warm, and his manifestations of it so unaffected, simple, and engaging, that his friends never could retire far enough from him to appreciate the colossal proportions of the man; they feel toward him and his memory as did David toward Jonathan; their love for him passes the love of women.

The beautiful bust which has been just unveiled gives the beholder a truthful idea of the outer man. The accomplished artist has done all that genius and skill, stimulated by love and admiration for his subject, could to perpetuate the impression of Mr. Lincoln's appearance. The biographer and historian must record his deeds, and the judgment of the world determine whether they were for the good or ill of mankind; I will assume the humble task of trying to make you acquainted with the inner man, as I saw and knew him.

In early life Mr. Lincoln had to bear and struggle with poverty and obscurity, a fortune not uncommon with distinguished men in America. Cheerfully and with persistent courage, he surmounted those difficulties. No vulgar ambition called him to the labor which resulted in success. A high sense of duty to himself, his family, his country, mankind, and to God, made him consecrate himself to pursuits which illustrated his powers, and attracted the attention, first of his neighbors, then of his State, then of the nation, and finally of the world. You may remember, it was not the fierce blustering wind that made the traveler drop his cloak, but

the steady shining of the quiet sun—no boisterous exhibition of imagined powers, claiming a reward for assumed importance, but the persistent exercise of high and generous impulses in all the lines of life, secured for him that regard which ultimately placed him in the ranks of the foremost men of his day.

Discarding the ostentation and pretense of the vulgarly ambitious, he bent all the energies of an honest and earnest nature to the development of such powers as God had given him, conscious that the highest aim of man is to perfect himself, and not merely to occupy a place; and it was this which gave him so strong a hold upon the confidence and affections of the American people, and in it consisted much of the power he unconsciously exercised over all who came within the range of his personal influence.

A strong sense of duty, impelled by an ardent love of truth, justice, and freedom, was the feeling which ever swayed Mr. Lincoln in private and public life; love of truth made him tolerant of the opinions of others—he judged not lest he might be judged; love of justice made him not only unselfish, but generous, and his judgments sure; and love of freedom made him ever ready to acknowledge the rights of the humblest as well as the most exalted. His nature was too purely noble to feel, or even suspect, that his privileges would be diminished, or his dignity lessened by according to others that which was their due.

Hannibal, when a boy, was made by his father to swear eternal enmity to Rome. The Carthagenian's hatred destroyed his country, and the Carthagenian name perished from the earth. Mr. Lincoln saved his country by love, and his name will linger coeval with its duration.

His character was the legitimate product of American institutions. Step by step he ascended from the humblest to the highest position. His elevation was not an accident. The student of his life must see that he was the child of progress, as the student of our institutions must acknowledge that they are founded on the law of progress. Not the irregular and revolutionary efforts that would pull down rather than build up, but that progress that would wisely use the debris of the past to fertilize the soil for the coming seasons, the healthy and life-giving progress which comes

from a clearer and broader view of human rights and a larger experience, inducing a prudent effort to rectify, not destroy; the progress which makes the lessons and wisdom of our fathers the pedestal upon which brighter and higher hopes are to be realized in the future; the progress which springs from a sense of duty, and makes us ever recognize "that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary." As the child of progress, Mr. Lincoln's character grew and developed in obedience to its surroundings. His was a life of growth and expansion from the cradle to the grave. There are many lives like to certain streams, larger at their source than ever after. They start off with some promise from the parent fountain, but receiving no wayside accessions to their strength, are gradually absorbed, or stagnate and sink, having refreshed no living thing, vegetable or animal. Mr. Lincoln's life was not one of these. Originating in the lower slopes of the mountains, and, by that law of progress which was native to him, and fostered by the institutions of the country, cutting itself a channel through fertile lands, it swelled into a majestic river, adding beauty and richness to all the territory that it touched.

It has been, and still is, often said that he was a common joker, a frivolous jester, wanting in depth and earnestness of character. This is not true. In the depths of his soul there was earnestness as true and pure as ever inspired a human breast. He was fond of a story—joking was a relief to him; he used jokes as Æsop did fables. Wit is often hard and harsh; humor is ever allied to kindness. A striking characteristic of the man was this infinite humor; it was as exhaustless as the benevolence in his heart. The generosity of the blind Persian, who gave away his slave to the traveler who needed a guide, is hardly more extravagant than a thousand good deeds that illustrate the large heartedness of Mr. Lincoln; and the laugh under the genial glow of his humor, was as impulsive and certain as the sound from the statute of Memnon under the touch of sunlight. Their joint influence enabled him to smooth many a rough pathway for others, while they lit up many a dark moment in his own eventful life. Across his way of life there ran no Shasta stream, encrusting with stone the very

flowers which bloomed upon its borders. From his nature flowers sprang wanton.

The newspapers tell us that the workmen on the basement of Pompey's pillar found inscriptions dating beyond the period of its erection. So, in searching into human character, we often find foundation-precepts, not open to the casual observer, which antedate its own development. These foundation-precepts were too deeply engraved ever to be erased from the heart of him whose impulses and whose powers were consecrated to Right, and Honor, and Truth. Upon the basement stones which support the noble superstructure to which the American people look with pride to-day, were written words of Wisdom from the Book of Life.

In human as in physical geology, there is generally very little difficulty in discovering the character of metal under the surface. It is so usually shallow as to glitter in the eyes of all, but now and then the superstrata covers up a deep mine of rich ore, and, while the indications of its existence are all satisfactory, we are often long baffled in search of it; but when the vein is opened and its value tested, the reward comes, for it is worked up into a crown of glory, which shines far down through the ages, cheering all along its pathway of light. Those who shall be in the Great Hereafter, will be encouraged by his example and life to hope and search for a brighter light and higher glory.

Mr. Lincoln was as unselfish, as free from envy, jealousy, and malice as any man that ever lived. When he said, "With malice toward none, and charity for all; with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work," it was no figure of speech, but a true copy from the tablet of his heart.

He was attached to no church, and held no especial creed of faith, and yet his nature was deeply religious. Faith in the providence of God, and in the ultimate and complete triumph of the right, whether as he or others saw it, the right as God ordained it, gave him courage and hope. Afflictions to man or nation were, according to his faith, sent by God in retribution or for their purification. Feeling that all things are ordained by an All-Wise Providence, he bore the burden imposed without a murmur or complaint.

Mr. Lincoln was not a learned man, nor did he pretend to be. That education which comes from severe and earnest thought, he had. Without pretending to scholarly attainments, by reason of his clear conceptions and earnest convictions he uttered sentences that will be remembered as long as human feelings and thoughts are expressed by language. Though not learned, he was more and better than learned men usually are—he was a wise man. "Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers."

Through all the avenues trodden by multitudes of thinkers and workers in every conceivable vocation of life, knowledge comes—comes thick and fast, accumulates in great storehouses, priceless in value—but it is only here and there in a generation, that the man comes whose peculiar organization absorbs the labor of all others, assimilates it to himself, and shows what wisdom is. His wisdom was shown in his patient waiting for the golden occasion, though goaded on by the rashly progressive; his wisdom was shown by prompt action when the apt moment came, though vilified by the timid and halting conservative; his wisdom was manifested by his determined constancy during the war, though his soul yearned for peace; but higher and above all, his wisdom was shown in this, that, though throughout the whole period of that terrible struggle, surrounded as he was by the waves of passion which swept over the high places of the nation, no moment of the fierce conflict found him without the branch of olive; for, while the oak leaves were entwined and ready for his brow, his generous heart ever turned to the olive rather than the oak, and high above the storm which raged with such relentless fury, rose the spirit of his Love to all men, visible in its serene height, and beautiful as the bow which to-day, as of old, tells of God's promise to man; and who can say what resistless might and power the vision of that all-embracing love gave to the one side; and who shall tell how it amazed, how it rebuked, how it confounded an unnerved the other.

Love to God and man is the beginning—it is the end—and it contains all that is of human wisdom; and when passion shall have subsided, and calmness and quiet come—a period he was only permitted to see from Pisgah's heights—the large measure of his wisdom will be acknowledged of all men.

The accident of birth gives to Kentucky the glory of his nativity; but we are too proud of his manhood to claim any merit on that account, to him or to us.

The hunter, who, from his valley-cabin, traps an eaglet and marks it for his own, soon finds that an inborn strength of wing has carried it to wider valleys and higher mountains; that the continent is its home, and high places its familiar haunts.

He loved Kentucky as the place of his nativity, and was ever ready to manifest his love to her sons and daughters. His patriotism, however, could never be narrowed and dwarfed by State or sectional lines, as his love for man was never confined, but embraced all who wore God's image. When he uttered the word, brethren, there were no understood reservations as to color or station—sinned against or sinning, man was his brother; and when he said country, he meant the United States of America, each and all, as well as those that madly sought to sever the bonds that make us one, and thereby fling far off the day of universal freedom, as those that remained true to the cause which had his love and reverence, and to which he had consecrated his life.

Mr. Lincoln was simple, artless, true, brave, generous; full of charity in his conceptions of right and duty; clear, noble, and all-embracing, and a faithful worker to accomplish the great and good objects of his heart.

Let Kentucky, his native State, Indiana and Illinois, the States of his adoption, the nation, and all mankind, be thankful for his life, and sorrow in his death. Let the thanksgiving be genuine as the sorrow is real. Philosophy and Religion alike teach us that each is a part of human destiny, and the heart that fails to render the one is lifted less gently from the depths it reaches by reason of the other. It is the spirit of thankfulness which gives the silver lining to the clouds, which, without it, would darken more than half the heavens. Let us look back, then, not all in sorrow. It is this backward looking which often gives us brighter visions in the future, and in either vista, the backward or the forward, let us never forget the hand that gave us Abraham Lincoln, and which leadeth through green pastures and beside still waters.

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